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Conference report

Report on the Vth International Conference of the Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry (SOSTEJE) held at the Addis Abeba University 13–15 October 2004

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Conferences

ghe des äthiopischen Klosters Hayq als Quellen zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte” behandelte Manfred Kropp eine im Evangeliar von Hayq enthaltene Sammlung von 34 Urkunden. Exemplarisch stellte er eine Urkunde über eine Landstiftung an das Kloster Hayq vor und erläuterte deren Relevanz für das Steuerwesen. Die Urkunden beleuchten darüber hinaus verschiedene Aspekte der äthiopischen Kultur und Sprache, wie z.B. Rechtstermini, altamharischen Wortschatz, Onomastik, die Rolle von Frauen im Rechtsleben u.a.

Im fachübergreifenden Panel “Lehnbeziehungen in vorderorientalischen Sprachen” handelte Stefan Weninger in seinem Vortrag “Lexikalische Lehnbeziehungen um das Mare erythraeum” hauptsächlich über die Rolle Südarabiens als lexikalisches Ausstrahlungszentrum im späten 1. Jahrtausend v. Ch. und frühen 1. Jahrtausend n. Chr., dessen Wirkung sich im äthiopischen und nordarabischen Kulturwortschatz niederschlägt.

Angesichts der thematischen Vielfalt verzichteten die Organisatoren auf die Veröffentlichung von Kongressakten. Der nächste Deutsche Orientalistentag findet im Jahr 2007 in Freiburg/Breisgau statt.

Michael Waltisberg – Stefan Weninger, Philipps-Universität Marburg

Report on the Vth International Conference of the Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry (SOSTEJE) held at the Addis Abeba University 13–15 October 2004

The Vth International Conference on “Changes of Landscapes for Ethiopian Jews” was opened in Makonnen Hall, in the presence of the Minister of Culture and Sport of Ethiopia, the Ambassador Teshome Togua, the President of Addis Abeba University, Andrias Eshete, the Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), Elisabeth Giorgis, the Ambassador of Israel, Doron Grossman, the ex-Minister of Absorption in Israel, Yair Tsaban and of the SOSTEJE President, Emanuela Trevisan Semi.

Apart from the two general introductions (the “Ethiopianness of the Beta Israel” by Richard Pankhurst and “The question of Jewish Identity” by Ephraim Isaac) the conference dealt with three broad themes:

- the history and memory of the Beta Israel with a special focus on Faitlovitch’s pupils,

- the process of constructing a new identity in Israel with special focus on issues of education and integration,

- the changes in disease patterns and health problems. The presence of six speakers with Israeli Ethiopian Jewish descent (out of 27), added value, and special interest to this conference. The Conference was closed by the presentation of three documentary films, two by Daniel Friedmann (*What happened to the Immigrants* and *In search of a lost festival*) and one by Gadi ben Ezer (*The*

journey via Sudan in Memory and Ceremony in Israel) and with a display of two photo exhibitions (one by Robert Gommlich and one by Irene Fertik).

Rachel Klein presented a preliminary report based on archaeological findings revealing the daily lives of Beta Israel in Gondar and the daily relations with their Orthodox neighbours. This is part of her doctorate work which will certainly show interesting data at the end of her work.

Two papers, well coordinated with each other, concerned the life of Taamrat Emmanuel, the first referring to the writings of Taamrat (Shiferaw Bekele), while the other dealt with the poor place held by Taamrat in the memory of the Ethiopian Jews, two generations after his death (Emanuela Trevisan Semi). Shalva Weil presented her studies on one of Faitlovitch's pupils, Tadesse Jacob, focusing on his stay in Cairo (from 1931 to 1940) and addressed the question of his fortune in Addis Abeba as Director of the Ministry of Finance in Ethiopia. The presence of Marta Tadesse, Tadesse's daughter, added a special significance to the talk.

Sigrid Sohn illustrated the typical western attitude shown towards the so called "black brethren" of Africa, through the analysis of the journey of an Ashkenazi Jew (Chaim Shoshkes) in 1953 as depicted in his book written in Yiddish. Faitlovitch's views on Judaism (universalism versus particularism) were analysed by Haim Admor. The reasons for Yemeni Jews' immigration to Ethiopia and the purpose of their settling while arguing about the creation of a new Yemeni or Adani identity was the topic of Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman's speech. Benyam Meckuria compared the role of the priests (*qesočč*) in Ethiopia and Israel. The issues related to the preservation of Ethiopian Jewish Heritage were the main topics of the morning session of 14 October: Shelomo Akale, director of Bahalachin Center in Israel, presented his project for the preservation of the Ethiopian Jewish History and Culture by the creation of a genealogy database for Ethiopian Jewish families. The database now preserves the ancestry of more than 11,000 family trees. Kessaye Begashaw of the Department of History Of Addis Abeba University illustrated the project of a Beta Israel Museum and research centre in Addis Abeba. His intention is to create a centre that will assess the contribution of Jewish legacy in shaping the historical and cultural development of modern Ethiopia. At the end of the conference the formal inauguration of this project was held at the presence of the Ethiopian and Israeli authorities. Amakletch Teferi also presented the results of a survey on the place that Israel occupies in the imagination of Ethiopians both in its mythical and in its real dimension. She showed how Israel still represents in the eyes of both Orthodox as well as Muslim Ethiopians a fascinating country that they expect could help to the developing of Ethiopia.

Vittorio Morabito and Edith Bruder analyzed different models of creating new Jewish identities in Africa and Polynesia.

Many lectures were devoted to issues of education and integration and most of the Ethiopians coming from Israel were particularly interested in these topics. Chen Lifshitz of the Brookdale Institute exposed a part of her doctoral dissertation focusing on the identification of those factors which can contribute to the successful integration of the Ethiopian immigrant adolescents into the education system. Gadi Ben Ezer presented a project aiming in empowering parents in cultural transition through computers directly in the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants' homes. Fanta Yardená stressed that their cultural transition is characterized by the need to exchange one set of complex skills with another rather than moving from simplicity into sophistication while Dani Teká was concerned with parental involvement in school system in Israel. Shimon Solomon talked about the differences in education in Ethiopia and Israel as perceived by Ethiopian immigrant teachers, while Simha Getahun spoke of Beta Israel youth in distress in Israel. Adgoechoa Esther presented the beginning of her MA work on the self identity of young Ethiopians from the sub-group Baryoch within the Israeli-Ethiopian community.

A relevant session held at the Black Lion Hospital was devoted to the changes in the health issues. Many Ethiopian doctors from the famous Addis Abeba hospital attended this session.

Aicheh Seffefe from the Ministry of Absorption of Israel and the municipality of Netania presented a paper on epidemiological study of disease patterns among the Ethiopian Jewish Immigrants focusing on diseases imported and acquired in Israel. The results broadly show that imported infectious diseases were more common among the later than the earlier immigrants while there appears to be an increase in asthma among the earlier immigrants since their arrival in Israel. Other diseases, like overweight, high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus and mental disorder were acquired in Israel. Anita Nudelman dealt with Ethiopian immigrant adolescents' perception and attitudes towards male-female relationships and sexual health behaviour and HIV/AIDS. Rafi Youngmann (Centre Recherche Français de Jérusalem [CRFJ]) and Nelly Zilber (Falk Institute for Mental Health and Behavioral Studies, Jerusalem) lectured on patterns of psychiatric hospitalization and on the planning of mental health services for the Jewish Ethiopians.

A conclusive trip to the cemeteries of Wolleka and Tedda showed the ongoing changes in the ancient Beta Israel areas in which Israeli Ethiopians come to build up new tombs in Israeli style, to remember parents and grandparents previously recalled by a pile of stones.

A visit to the compound of Falas muras in Gondar that gives hospitality to 11,600 people (who do not live inside the compound but come there daily to be fed, educated and converted) gave the participants a deep insight and a concrete perception of how human issues could cross scholarly research.

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